



Real Fuel: Using Food to Improve Well-Being

What You Put In Changes How You Feel

Have you ever filled your car with bad gas? It splutters and coughs, then runs a bit ragged until all that bad fuel is gone.

Food is fuel for our bodies. There's a direct and clear connection between what you put in your body and how you feel. Not all food is created equal!

Your body needs fuel (or calories) in order to function. However, not all calories have the same nutritional impact. Too much or too little of any one can cause problems.

Every calorie you consume is made up of some combination of these three elements:

FAT

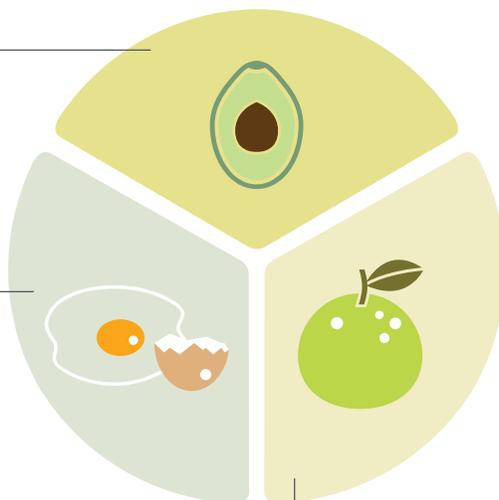
stores energy and helps the body absorb vitamins

PROTEIN

is the building block of muscle and cells

CARBOHYDRATES

are turned into glucose, which provides energy



Many foods will cause our bodies to splutter and choke, just like a car with bad gas.

Do you struggle with these symptoms?

- Headaches, especially in the afternoon
- Low energy
- Feeling hungry within a couple hours after eating
- Bloating
- Digestive issues (constipation or diarrhea)

Food may not be the only cause, but it can certainly play a role. Fortunately, your body will let you know how it feels about the fuel you're giving it. The trick is to pay attention, making notes about what you eat and how it makes you feel. Then you can make small changes and get on the road to better health.

What's Your Fuel Quality?

Here are some examples of common food choices that seem healthy, but that can actually cause some of those undesirable symptoms.

Breakfast

Cereal

Most cereals are loaded with sugar and have very little protein. When you eat cereal for breakfast, you'll feel both hungry and tired a few hours.

INSTEAD: Try low-sugar oatmeal or low-sugar yogurt.

Breakfast breads, muffins, bagels.

Anything made from dough is loaded with carbohydrates. Even something that sounds healthy, like a bran muffin, is usually very high in sugar. All of these choices can make you crave a nap...and a snack!

INSTEAD: Multigrain bread with a little peanut butter.

Coffee.

Coffee has no nutritional value. Too much coffee floods your stomach with acid and caffeine that can lead to diarrhea. Also, since coffee is a diuretic, it actually pulls water out of your body, which can lead to constipation.

INSTEAD: drink one cup of coffee and then switch to water.

Lunch/Afternoon Snacks

Salad.

This is a wickedly deceptive food. Lettuce is mostly water and provides no fiber or protein. Dressing is often loaded with fat and sugar. You're going to feel hungry very soon!

INSTEAD: try dark leafy greens like kale or spinach with lean protein and lots of veggies, then drizzle lightly with vinaigrette.

Granola bars.

Most granola bars have a lot of carbohydrates but not a lot of protein or fiber. So once again, you'll feel hungry or tired very soon.

INSTEAD: choose high protein or high fiber bars...just watch the calorie count.

Energy drinks.

These drinks are full of sugar and caffeine, which give the illusion of energy. However, your body receives no nutritional value from this choice. There's a good chance you'll have a caffeine-induced rebound headache and feel even more tired later.

INSTEAD: use food to provide energy and switch to water!

Dinner

Mac & Cheese with hotdogs.

Boxed macaroni and cheese is essentially carbohydrates and salt. The hotdog has protein, but many varieties include a staggering amount of salt and fat. With a bun and lots of ketchup, you're really amping up the sugar. This meal also wreaks havoc on digestion. The carbs and salt slurp up water, and there's virtually no fiber in this meal. That's the recipe for constipation.

INSTEAD: choose low sodium hot dogs, reduce the pasta and add a cheese-friendly veggie like broccoli.

Spaghetti.

Typical white pasta is almost all carbohydrates. The tomato sauce is full of sugar and usually high in salt. You'll feel bloated from all the carbs, and yet still hungry later at night because there's little to no protein in this meal. There's also very little fiber here, which contributes to constipation.

INSTEAD: Mix high-protein pasta and half zucchini noodles, and add ground turkey or chicken to the sauce.

Resources

Here are just a few of the many resources available to you through the North Ottawa Wellness Foundation partners and connected organizations.

- realfoodcan.org: recipes, ideas, techniques and more.
- nochgetbetter.com: sign up for newsletter, learn about classes and public seminars.
- tcfymca.org: nutrition consultation and training classes.
- northottawawellnessfoundation.org: articles, links and more.

